

1491: The Americas Before Columbus



How do we know about Native Americans' early history?

- European accounts
- A few surviving written accounts from Native Americans
- Oral traditions and cultural practices
- Archaeology and other sciences

Origins



Agriculture

- Maize (corn) was domesticated about 9,000 years ago in Mexico.
- Potatoes were domesticated about 8,000 years ago in South America.
- Native Americans became farmers and their populations exploded.
 - In 1500
 - ~55,000,000 people lived in the Americas.
 - ~3,800,000 lived in North America.



Mayan Maize
God

North American Crops



Sunflower, domesticated
about 4000 years ago



Squash, cultivated
by at least 3000 years ago.

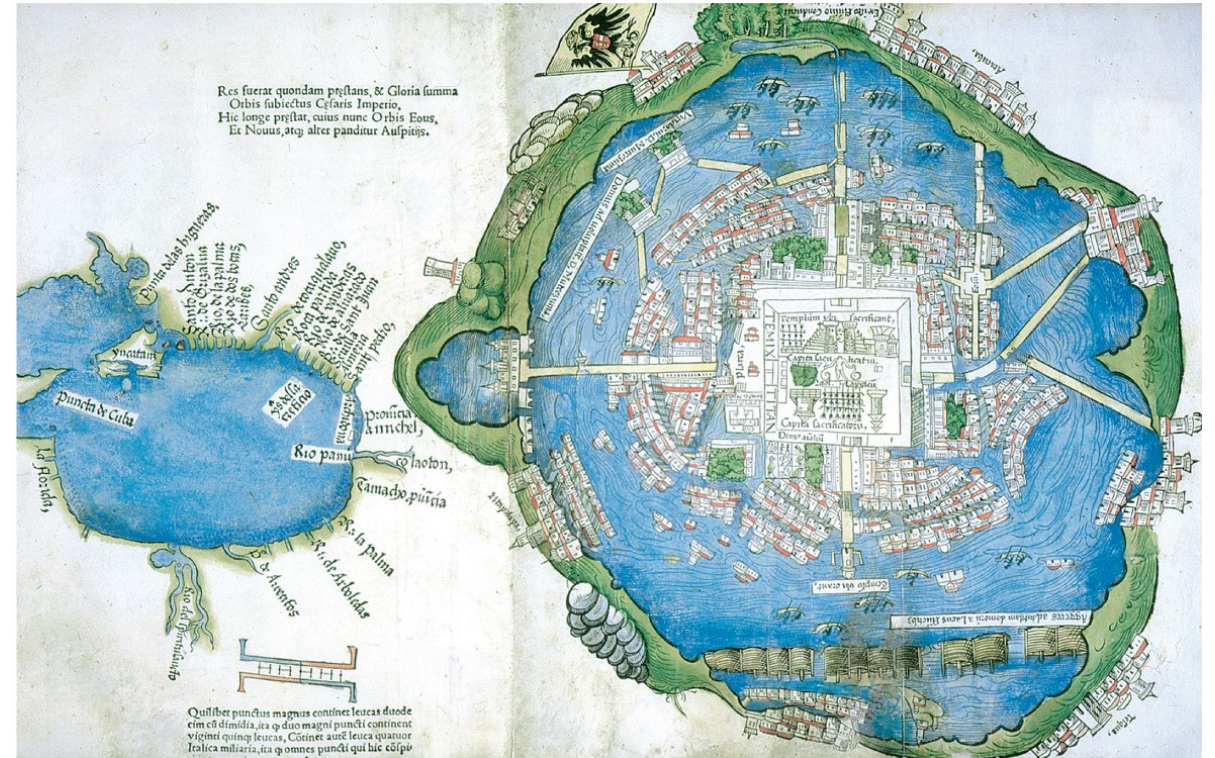
Corn



Hidatsa performing the Green Corn Dance

Cultures and Societies

- Native Americans had complex cultures and societies.
- Example: The Aztec
 - Dominated central Mexico by the 1300s
 - Practiced complex agriculture
 - Had large cities
 - Had writing and complex mathematics



A Spanish map of
Tenochtitlan

Cultural Features



Aztec Codex



Aztec Calendar

Other Major Urban Civilizations



Mayans



Incans

In North America

- Urban societies did exist.
- Example: Cahokia
 - Near modern St. Louis
 - In 1250, Cahokia had a population about the same as London or Paris.
 - Centered on a large earthen pyramid
 - Center of a larger polity with hierarchical social organization



An Artist's Recreation of Cahokia at its Peak

Cahokia Today

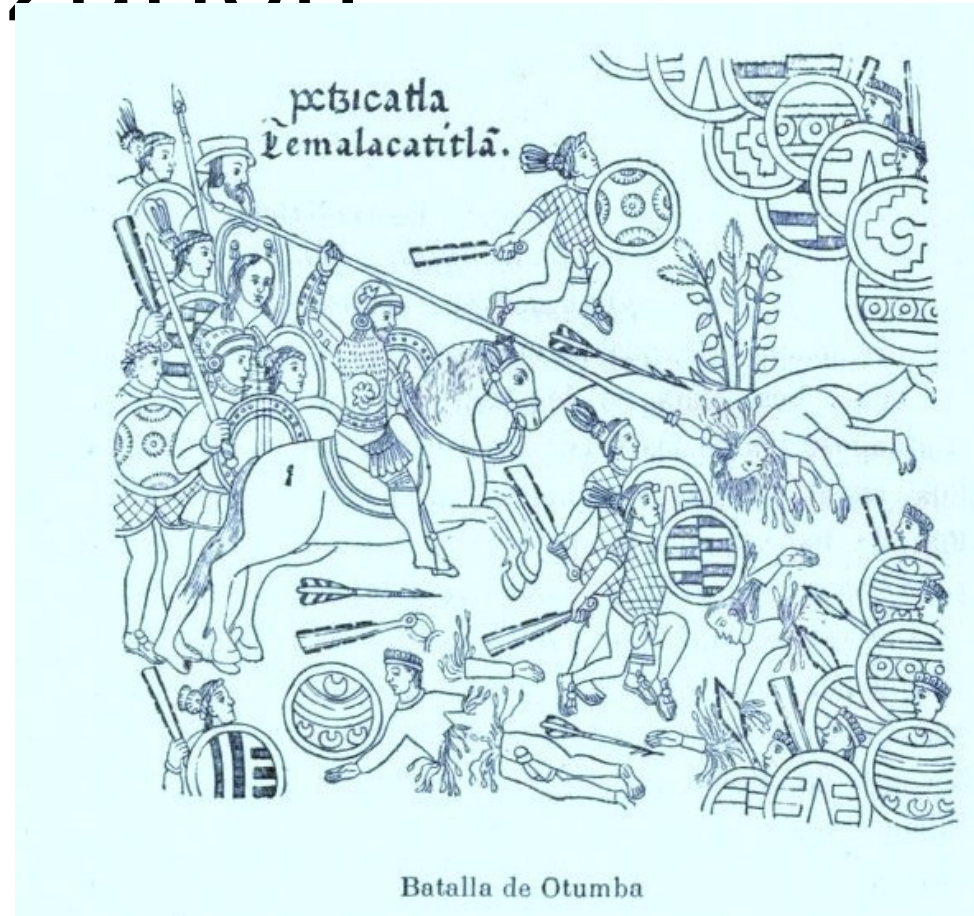


Urban Places in North America



Why were they vulnerable to European conquest and colonization?

- Steel
- Horses
- Guns
- Ocean-going ships



Why vulnerable to European conquest?

- **A lack of immunity to European diseases made the difference.**

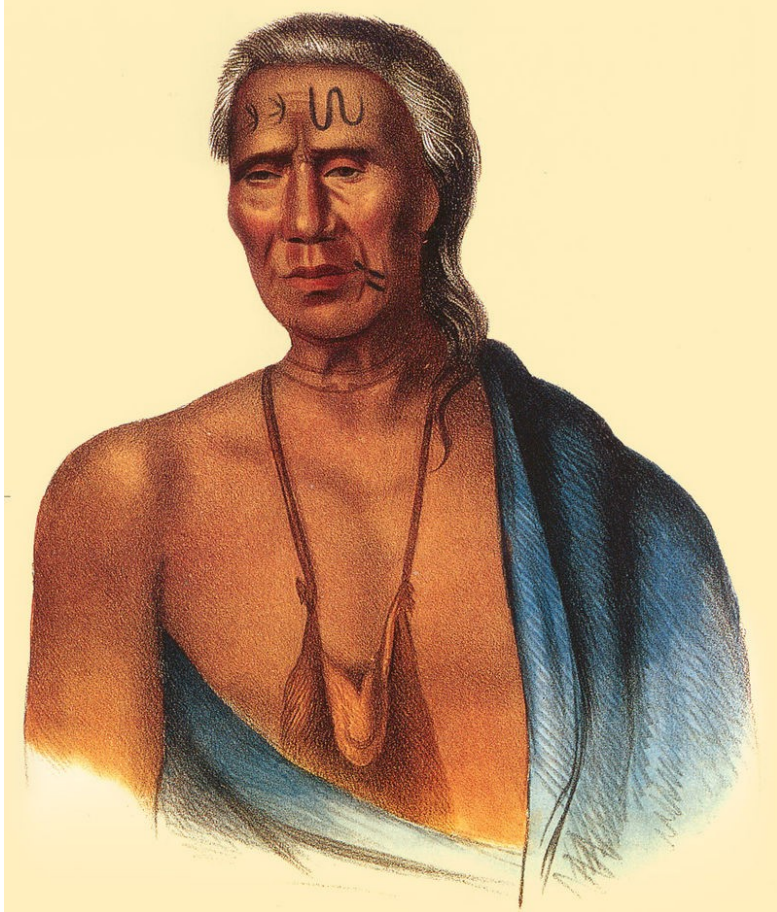
- Up to 90% of Native Americans died in epidemics.
- European aggression and mistreatment prevented recovery.
- Africans and Asians had immunity to the same diseases as Europeans.
- Europeans were often vulnerable to diseases endemic to Africa and Asia.



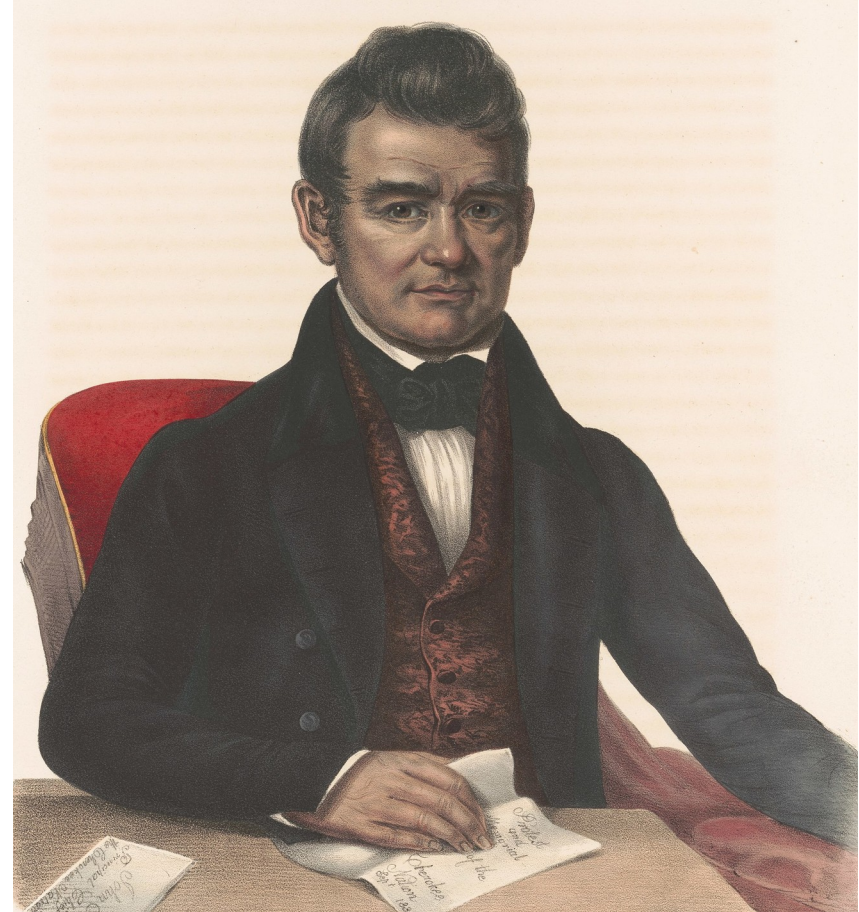
The Eastern Woodlands



Who are we talking about?



Lappawinsoe, a Lenape Chief, 1735



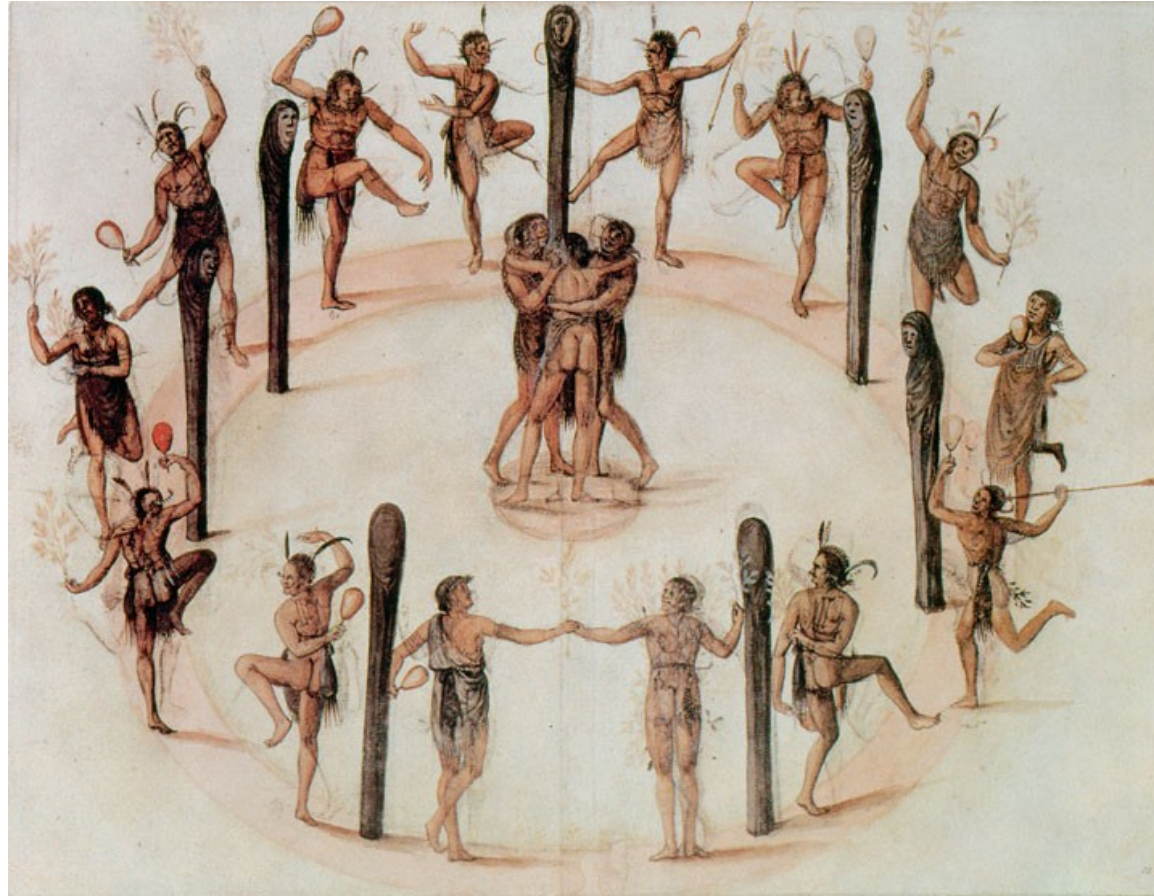
John Ross, a Cherokee Chief, mid 1800s

In Eastern North America

- Neolithic people
 - Village-dwellers
- Farmers
- Hunters
- Fishermen



Common Cultural Characteristics: Religion



Common Cultural Characteristics: Property



Powhatan, Powhatan Chief in Virginia, early 1600s



King James I of England, early 1600s

Common Cultural Characteristics: Gender



A Sioux Family in present-day Minnesota, 1770s

Common Cultural Characteristics: War



Battle, Huron and French vs. Iroquois, 1609



Model of Pre-Contact Iroquois Armor

Europeans and Native Americans

- How did Europeans view Native Americans?
 - How did Morton seem to view Native Americans?
 - What does the Gaspesian document suggest about how other Europeans viewed them?
- How did Native Americans view Europeans?
 - How did the Gaspesian man seem to understand the French presence in his country?
 - How did he feel about French ways of living? Native ways of living?
 - How did he seem to view Europeans?